



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 4, 2006

CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
HERBERT HADAD, MEGAN GAFFNEY
HEATHER TASKER, BRIDGET KELLY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600

PREPARER OF FRAUDULENT IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS ARRESTED

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that MARIA MAXIMO of the Bronx was arrested today on mail fraud charges filed in Manhattan federal court, stemming from a scheme to charge immigrants between hundreds or thousands of dollars to file immigration applications that MAXIMO knew were baseless and would ultimately be denied.

According to a criminal complaint unsealed today, MAXIMO operated an immigration-document preparation service out of the storefront of a non-profit organization, Jamalali Uagucha, Inc., located at 1911 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York. From that location MAXIMO charged illegal immigrants between \$500 to \$2,500 to prepare applications that she claimed would result in work permits and green cards. More than 1,300 baseless immigration applications were submitted by MAXIMO between 2004 and 2005. Based on the number of applications submitted and the fee schedules reflected in Maximo's marketing materials, it is estimated that MAXIMO may have received more than \$1 million for preparing these applications.

According to the Complaint, MAXIMO operated two immigration fraud schemes. In the first scheme, in effect in 2004, MAXIMO would inform illegal immigrants that she could obtain employment authorization documents -- commonly known as work permits -- for a fee of \$500. However, illegal immigrants cannot obtain work permits: only individuals who are in the country lawfully or are applying for lawful immigration status are entitled to them. Despite this, MAXIMO prepared and submitted approximately 500 work permit applications on behalf of illegal immigrants who did not qualify for them.

The Complaint alleges that MAXIMO's second scheme, in effect in 2005, involved a claim that she could get "green cards" for any illegal person in the United States. MAXIMO told illegal immigrants

that for a fee, which over time grew from \$500 to \$2,500, she would prepare a "legalization" application which would result in the applicants receiving green cards. MAXIMO would then prepare and file an application under the LULAC program, which provides temporary residence to certain illegal immigrants who have been in the United States since 1982. MAXIMO, however, did not tell the applicants that they had to be in the country since 1982 to qualify for LULAC and in many instances told applicants that 10 years or even a shorter period of residence in the United States was enough. MAXIMO prepared and submitted at least 800 baseless LULAC applications for individuals who did not qualify.

According to the Complaint, MAXIMO made false claims about the availability of work permits and green cards in marketing materials and in statements to immigrants who came to her office seeking her services. Some of her false statements were recorded by individuals who had sought her services, including one woman who wore a hidden camera for a news program broadcast on WWOR-TV in 2005.

The Complaint charges MAXIMO with two counts of mail fraud, and on each count MAXIMO faces a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment and a maximum fine the greater of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or gross loss from the offense.

MAXIMO will appear for presentment before a federal magistrate judge today at a time to be set by the Court.

ELIOT SPITZER, the New York Attorney General, separately announced today that he was filing a civil lawsuit against MAXIMO and Jamalali Uagucha, Inc., for violations of New York consumer protection law, among other things. Mr. SPITZER said: "Preying on the desperation within our immigrant communities to adjust immigration status with fraudulent offers is unscrupulous and illegal. We will enforce the law against those who defraud people seeking a better life for themselves and their children."

MARTIN D. FICKE, Special Agent-in-Charge of New York Immigration and Customs Enforcement, stated: "One of ICE's priorities is to insure the integrity of our immigration system. This woman broke the law and tried to defraud the government of more than 1,000 immigration benefits. These crimes are without conscience and will not be tolerated. We want to thank the employees of USCIS who identified the fraud which enable ICE to make today's arrest."

Mr. GARCIA stated: "MARIA MAXIMO's clients wanted to obtain legal immigration status and instead fell victim to her greed. The

'applications' filed in this case were nothing but a fraud concocted to profit off their desperation."

Mr. GARCIA also praised Immigration and Customs Enforcement for its investigation of this matter, and said that the investigation was continuing. Mr. GARCIA also thanked the New York Attorney General's Office, the Bronx District Attorney's Office, and the New York State Police for their efforts. Mr. GARCIA invited anyone with information about this case to contact the U.S. Attorney's Office at 212-637-2554.

Assistant United States attorneys ARLO DEVLIN-BROWN and SEETHA RAMACHANDRAN are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the complaint are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

06-48

###